Illinois History:
A Magazine for Young People
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Teachers, Students, Librarians, and other interested readers

This is the first version of the newly formatted *Illinois History*. This is the first exclusively on-line version of *Illinois History*. For fifty-five years and the first issue of the fifty-sixth volume, "A Magazine for Young People," as *Illinois History* has been subtitled, the magazine has been available exclusively by subscription and in printed version.

We're excited about this historic departure because we know the advantages it will offer our young historians and the teachers who guide them. The on-line version will permit greater flexibility than has been true with a fixed number of pages. As a result, for example, this first issue of our electronic *Illinois History* will carry a number of articles that we were unable to place in the December issue entitled "Immigrants and Refugees in Illinois Since 1945." That issue was completed entirely with student articles resulting from the Chicago Historical Society's documentation project: "Global Communities: Chicago's Immigrants and Refugees". Students from other schools submitted articles too good to go unpublished but too numerous to place in the December 2002 issue. Those additional articles appear here. Another virtue in this era of serious budget considerations is that *Illinois History* will be available at no cost, simply by looking at the web site. Good student writing needs to be and will still be acknowledged each spring at the Illinois History Exposition in the awards for research and writing in the junior and senior high school categories.

Illinois History is stepping forward with the new century. It will remain a fine show case for good student historians and we want you to encourage students to contribute. Look on-line for each issue and postings about forthcoming topics on our web site at www.state.il.us/hpa/education.htm. Thanks for all your support and enthusiasm about this longest-lived of the Educational Services programs of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Welcome!

Very sincerely yours,

Keith A. Sculle
Editor, *Illinois History: A Magazine for Young People*

Chicago's Assyrian Americans

Jessica Baniamin

Jamieson School, Chicago

Teacher: Jackie Turlow

Most of Chicago's Assyrian Americans started to migrate from their countries of origin in the 1970s. Assyrians are descendants of the ancient Assyrian people who built the mighty empires of Assyria and Babylonia. They are indigenous to Mesopotamia and have a history of over 6700 years. Assyrians have played a major role in the civilization of mankind. After the fall of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires around the sixth and seventh centuries B.C., Assyrians were forced to become a small nation living at the mercy of overlords in the Middle East. Assyrians were among the first people to embrace Christianity. Assyrians were not allowed to learn Assyrian in Iraq. They were forced to learn Arabic.

Life for Assyrians was not always simple. In recent times, some Assyrians left their countries because they wanted to have more opportunities. Some left because they wanted to make something of themselves and some did not approve of political conditions in their countries. Many left because there was a war between Iraq and Iran. If men were turning eighteen they were required to enroll in the army. Iraq and Iran were fighting over land on the borders that both countries claimed. Saddam Hussein seized control of the government and forced Assyrian men into the military and kept them in the war against their own will for many years. This war lasted from 1980 to 1990, and over one million people died on both sides. Most Assyrians wanted better lives. In their countries there were not as many opportunities and money as there are here.

Assyrians immigrated to Chicago by passing through other American cities and states to settle here. Other Assyrians had to become diplomatic refugees to gain visas. Once the Assyrians had come here they had to find a way to support themselves.

When Assyrians first came to Chicago they had to learn how to survive in a different culture and environment. The Assyrians had to find careers. Some of the most common types of Assyrian-American businesses in Chicago include privately owned video rental stores, restaurants, gas stations, auto repair shops, convenience stores, auto dealerships, and beauty salons. Other common types of businesses are computer stores, alteration shops, air conditioning and heating, photography, insurance, real estate, and construction contractors. Assyrians built their own churches, restaurants, newspapers, a library, and more. One of the churches is located on Pulaski. One of the restaurants is called "Garden of Eden" located on Devon and Bell and an important newspaper is called the *Assyrian Times*. There is only one library of Assyrian literature in Chicago. It is located on Clark Street. Assyrians also have their own organizations such as The Assyrian Aid Society of America.

Assyrians have been fairly successful. For example, Assyrian Americans had fought in World War I and II. Organizations have built monuments to honor the Assyrians who fought and died for our country. They have tried to make Chicago a better place. Many have done amazing things.

Now that Assyrians have been here for a long time, life has become a little easier. Assyrians have had careers, raised families, formed their own communities and more. Today Assyrians live largely on the north side of the city. The greatest number are around West Rogers Park. Approximately 80,000 Assyrians live in Chicago and approximately sixty-four percent of Assyrians are foreign born. Chicago is home to the largest Assyrian population in the United States, second in the world only to Iraq.

[From Assyrian Aid Society, www.assyrianaid.org (Sept. 2, 2002); Assyrian American Veterans, www.edessa.com/vets/hosanna.htm (Sept. 2, 2002); Assyrians of Chicago, www.aina.org (Sept. 2, 2002); Brief History of Assyrians, www.aina.org (Sept. 2, 2002); student historian's interview with Khosaba Baniamin, Sept. 9, 2002; Richard Lindberg, *Ethnic Groups of Chicago*; *Metro Chicago*, Apr. 5, 1998; student historian's interview with Ashour Mosa, Sept. 9, 2002.]

"Heaven is a Place Called Rockford"

Miriam Carlson

Heritage School, Rockford

Teacher: Elizabeth Carlson

Two groups of people live in Laos: the Laotians who speak Lao and the Hmong, a mountain people who speak their own language. Both came to Illinois as refugees in the late 1970s. The Hmong, however, frequently joined their families in Wisconsin.

At the end of the Vietnam War, the Communists took over Laos, ending the Royal Lao regime. The Laotians who had opposed the Communists trusted no one. People feared being killed and many were placed in reeducation camps, which were really concentration camps. Over the next three years, 200,000 men, women, and children sought safety in Thailand. They settled in refugee camps, along the Lao-Thai border. Families of eight to ten lived in tents. From these camps Laotians settled in countries like Germany, France, and the United States.

About 100,000 ethnic Laotians came to the United States as refugees. Many Laotians settled in Rockford, Illinois. In 1980, 782 Laotians lived in Rockford. By 1990, they numbered 843. In 2000, they numbered 1,176. Laotians largely accounted for the thirty-seven percent increase of Asians in the Rockford area between 1990 and 2000 (see figure).

The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Catholic Charities helped settle Laotian families in the area around Zion Lutheran Church. In 1979, Zion first reached out to the immigrants in its neighborhood. The next year, the church began English classes for the Laotians.

In Laos, Khamphou Sisouphanthong worked at the American Embassy as a telephone technician. The embassy paid him to attend English language classes. He now wishes that he

had paid more attention. But at the time, he thought his life was "pretty good." He had worked for the embassy for ten years when one day, while driving a truck, he realized he was being followed. His friends were spying on him. Now, he could trust no one. Soon a friend told him his name was on a list circled in red. So he left. "I felt blind not knowing where I was going to go or what country I'll end up in. You never plan to leave. You don't care. You leave to save your life."

Sisouphanthong arrived in the United States on January 14, 1977, first working at an ice cream factory in Pennsylvania. "When I was on break you could eat as much ice cream as you wished." He then moved to Elgin, Illinois, to be near friends from Laos. He came to Rockford in 1978, for a job at Borg Warner on Harrison Avenue. Sisouphanthong was laid off in 1982. During that year Zion Lutheran Church needed a translator to work with the Laotian refugees. "Pastor Denver asked me, 'What do you do for work?' I replied, 'I'm laid off.'" Pastor Bitner then invited him to work for Zion as a refugee coordinator since he had "pretty good English."

When Zion members first heard of a family's arrival in Rockford, they immediately visited and helped them settle into their new life. Sisouphanthong worked to find them employment and to enroll their children in school. He helped in dealing with courts and other institutions. Sisouphanthong eventually went to the seminary and became the first Laotian pastor in the world.

Zion helped Laotians open shops through the newly established Zion Development Corporation. Sopha Manivong came to Rockford in 1983 and in eighteen months opened a TV repair shop on Seventh Street called "Sopha Electronic Service." Zion Development Corporation also financed a shop run by volunteers where Hmong women sold Pa Dao (a form of reverse appliqué) and Lao women sold hand woven silk. Sonny Sisouphanthong opened a restaurant on

Kishwaukee Street. The Symphommarth family operates the restaurant Phainam on Broadway. There are also several Asian markets in the area.

The Laotians created their own religious institutions, too. They opened a Buddhist temple in 1985. The First Evangelical Free Church helped found the Lao Evangelical Free Church on Fourth Avenue in the mid-1980s. In 1996, Chantalang, a bilingual teacher at East High, started a Lao church meeting Sunday afternoons at Rock Church.

The traditional problems of immigration to America affected the Rockford Laotians. Even though their apartments had several rooms, families frequently slept in one room, which was their custom. They also slept on the floor even though there were beds. But the greatest difficulty came when the children learned English and spent more time away from the home and from their parents. Sonny, Sisouphanthong's wife, also a Laotian refugee, has seen parents come home from work but unable to help their children. They then feel so lonesome. She wonders, "What are we going to do in the next generation?"

The journey to America had many stories of tragedy and heroism. Sonny's parents sent her to live with her older sister at the age of six, when the Communists took over their village. In 1975, she and her sister escaped to Thailand. They arrived in the United States on December 22, 1979, to join a relative in Rockford. Sonny was 22 years old. "When I left, I could not tell anyone, even my aunt."

Sonny and Khamphou Sisouphanthong say it was God who brought them here. As she showed a map of Laos to her son and his friend, she told them to be grateful that they lived in the United States and had opportunities not available in Laos. She said, "Although we are different, we are not better, just different." This past summer Sisouphanthong called a friend from Laos who now lives in France. France limits the number of hours the husband and spouse can work a week. They are not allowed to take another job to get ahead. Sisouphanthong stated that God

had a purpose in bringing the Lao people here: "We are just like the story of Moses." He continued: "I love America. I am proud to be an American citizen." As another Rockford Lao refugee, Daokham Thammavong, said: "Being in America is like going to Heaven."

[From student historian's interview with Denver Bitner, Sept. 16, 2002; student historian's interview with Lois Dixon, Sept. 16, 2002; Health Systems Research, *1990 Census Data for NW Illinois*; *Rockford Register-Star*, Nov. 24, 1979; Jan. 11, 1980; Sept. 9, 1983; Dec. 12, 1985; Dec. 11, 1988; June 29, 1992; and June 20, 1999; student historian's interview with Khamphou Sisouphanthong, Sept. 25, 2002; student historian's interview with Sonesakoune Sisouphanthong, Sept. 25, 2002; United States Census Bureau, *2000 Census*; United Way, *Profiles of Community Characteristics: Winnebago County and Northern Ogle County, Illinois*.]

Unlocked Doors to a New World:

The Muslim Community of Belleville, Illinois

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Teacher: Melissa Schmitt-Crafton

Before any federal inquiries of September 11, 2001, began, and even before clean-up efforts started at Ground Zero, many Americans were asking the question, "Who can we trust?" For a while, Americans were searching for this answer. In the oblivion of their minds, prejudices were formed and misconceptions were condoned. But as the smoke cleared, Lady Liberty still held her torch high in the air, and the words of Emma Lazarus rang true. The symbol of freedom provided many Americans with new attitudes, and new questions. Americans began to research into the religion of Islam, which resulted in many understanding more about Muslim culture. Unfortunately, it took a tragedy to develop a complete understanding between the two sides. September 11, 2001, was the day that not only united a nation, but united the city of Belleville.

On the outskirts of Belleville, near the Belleville line, in St. Clair County, is a white brick building with a golden dome. The building, secluded by trees, is modest with no fancy windows, large billboards, or lighted symbols. It is a place of worship known as The Mosque and Islamic Education Center of Belleville. Home to Metro-East Muslims since 1999, the center currently serves over 50 families. The building has become a unique feature in the Belleville community, and it does its part to bring unity to the city by promoting peace, harmony, and interaction between Muslims and other denominations.

Although a major factor in community relations now, the Mosque almost did not make it off the drawing board. The actual construction of the Mosque faced criticism and opposition

before any building began on the site. Local residents, with a negative predisposition towards Muslims feared that there would be unwanted violence in their community. The five Metro-East Muslim visionaries of the Mosque, Mohammed Kibria, Dr. Abdul Kazi, Dr. Anwar Khan, Dr. M. Khalid, and a Mahmood, were almost forced to take legal action. Finally, after hearing the Muslims' vision of peace in the community, local residents dropped all pending objections to the building, and construction began in 1996. Six years later, the men that were instrumental in the creation of the Mosque are now the leaders of the Muslim community.

One must understand that the Muslim people are very hesitant to talk about their experiences and lifestyle in the wake of the terrorist attacks in both America and the Middle East. Instead, two of the Mosque's visionaries served as spokespersons for Metro-East Muslims for the purpose of this paper. Mohammed Kibria is the President of the Mosque and Islamic Education Center of Belleville. He also teaches at Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville. The other visionary, Dr. Abdul Kazi, is a thoracic surgeon in Belleville.

The story of Mohammed Kibria begins in India in the late 1940s. His parents migrated to Bengal in 1947 because of religious persecution of Muslims. Bengal, which later became East Pakistan, is where Kibria spent his days as a youth. Luckily, he was raised by an affluent family. He and his siblings still followed the strict code of the *Quran*, which is the Islamic equivalent to the *Bible*. It is a code of conduct that prohibits any unhealthy actions, and sets standards for conduct, dress, and interaction.

Kibria described the educational system of East Pakistan, making it appear much like that of America's. Children attend school from kindergarten through high school, and those fortunate enough attend college. Only the most prominent or promising children get an educational opportunity to attend school in America or Great Britain. One major difference that Kibria pointed out was that special religious educators often came to his home to teach him and his

siblings the *Quran*. Because of his family's affluence, Kibria would have been given the opportunity to study abroad in Great Britain.

Unfortunately, a civil war had just begun in Pakistan, and Kibria's family felt that it was best that he leave the country sooner than they had planned. However, authorities quickly learned of Kibria's plan to leave Pakistan. A government edict allowed no one to leave East Pakistan because of the invasion and authorities headed to Kibria's house to prevent his escape. Fortunately, by the time they arrived, Kibria had already been smuggled by his father onto a plane bound for Great Britain. While looking for Kibria, however, the authorities shot and killed his brother. It is not known whether the shooting was accidental or intentional.

After arriving in England, Kibria attended Cambridge University and studied English, which enabled him to speak five languages: English, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, and Arabic. Other students who fled Pakistan also came to Great Britain, partially because Pakistan was part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and partly because the British government was willing to board Pakistani students.

In the latter part of 1969, Kibria received a letter from his life-long good friend who asked him to come to America. His friend was attending Southern Illinois University in Carbondale and asked Kibria to join him. Unfortunately, Kibria's country of East Pakistan had become Bangladesh. Because Kibria could not claim that he was East Pakistani or Bangladeshi, he could not apply for citizenship. "I was a man without a country," said Kibria. Instead of gaining citizenship, Kibria became a residential alien. Years later, he finally received his citizenship.

He described his first years while living in southern Illinois as difficult. Not many Muslims were coming to the United States, much less to southern Illinois, at this time, and once here his main contacts were Muslim. Weather was also different than what he was used to.

Before coming to Illinois, Kibria had not seen snow. He had difficulty with the language because of the various slang terms and dialects used. In spite of these difficulties, Kibria continued to study diligently, for he knew that his parents expected him to come back to Bangladesh when his studies were finished.

In the winter of 1969, Kibria was notified that he had received a student-assistantship in sociology at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville (SIUE). He arrived in the Metro-East region on January 3, 1970. One of the first things that he noticed about the area was the generosity of the people who always seemed to go out of their way to help the often confused foreign student. During this time, Kibria lived in Belleville with Mr. and Mrs. Jack Abens, his host family. At SIUE, Kibria played soccer, was a Who's Who Among American College Students, served as the Assistant Director of the Student Union, and was the first president of the International Student Association. In his spare time, Kibria often talked at Belleville high schools about his country and religion, and the importance for diversity. After receiving a degree in sociology, Kibria married, and took a job with the Missouri Department of Mental Health. His wife was originally an Italian Catholic who converted to Islam after attending prayer sessions with Kibria. "She discovered the beauty of Islam," Kibria said. He and his wife have two children. Currently, the Kibrias live in Belleville. Aside from his duties as the President of the Mosque, Kibria also teaches at Southwestern Illinois College in Belleville.

Another important visionary is Dr. Abdul Kazi. He was born in Pakistan in 1944, and had a childhood similar to that of Kibria's. Before coming to America, Dr. Kazi also lived in Great Britain for one and a half years. Dr. Kazi came with his wife to the United States in 1973. He had several friends that were physicians, and since that was the career he was interested in, he believed it would be a good opportunity for his practice.

His first impressions of America were somewhat different from those of Kibria's. Dr. Kazi felt that there were some differences and similarities between the United States, England, and Pakistan. Of course, he said that one of the main differences was the advanced technology that the United States had compared to Pakistan. In 1980, he moved to the Belleville area for his practice and still resides there with his wife. They have four children, two of whom are also studying to become physicians.

Although the aforementioned men are only two members of a growing population of Muslims in the Metro-East area, as leaders in their Mosque, their opinions reflect those of other Muslims who attend the Mosque. Although the number of Muslims living in the Belleville area seems small, the fact is that one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim.

Muslims live their lives under a set of laws written in the *Quran*. This holy book states that all Muslims must pray five times a day, and if possible, these prayers should be done at a Mosque. They cleanse themselves before prayer and take off their shoes as a sign of respect to themselves and most importantly, to their god, Allah. The religion of Islam has a strict ethical code. Muslims cannot eat pork, only kosher meat. No alcohol, sexuality, or affection in public is permitted. Although most Metro-East Muslim women drive, in some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, women are forbidden to do this. If possible, Muslims are also expected to give two and one half percent of their total income, if possible.

Since 1945, there have not been any major influx of immigration of Muslims to the Belleville area. Instead of coming in large groups as in the case of other immigrant groups, Muslims have arrived individually, or in very small groups, and began their families from there.

Muslims have the highest per capita income of any group of people living in the United States. This is due to the expectations placed on them by their families. Most of the Muslims living in the Belleville area work as physicians, engineers, scientists, and in managerial

positions. Unlike other ethnic groups and religions in Belleville which settled in compact groups, Muslims are spread throughout the city. They live with conjoined families, a practice that is now changing.

There are several reasons why many Muslims have come to the Belleville area. However, both visionaries agree on one thing. The Belleville area attracts Muslims because it is filled with opportunity, friends, need for professionals, and supportive people.

After the terrorist attacks on America, many local Muslims now find that people are more inquisitive about Islam. "It works out pretty well, people ask you questions, and people want to know more about the religion," Dr. Kazi said. Although many local Muslims were somewhat timid after the attacks, Kibria stated that fear soon ended because of the support that Muslims received from the Belleville community. "A lot of people do not think that life as a Muslim is the same, but it is. It has affected all of us in some way, economically and emotionally, especially," Dr. Kazi said.

Many Metro-East Muslims believe that their main goal is to keep educating people about the truth regarding Muslims. In the community of Belleville, Illinois, that mission operates smoothly. Muslim immigrants to the city have done their share to make Belleville prosper both economically, and socially. Residents are not afraid to interact with those who may have different beliefs and customs. They are now the ones following the proverb, "Never judge a book by its cover." Why? The answer is simple. Those who may be different and those we may have predispositions about may be the ones to lend a helping hand in times of need. They may be a leader in the community, or they just may be a friend.

[From student historian's interview with Dr. Abdul Kazi, Sept. 9, 2002; student historian's interview with Mohammed Kibria, Aug. 25, 2002.]

Mexican Migrant Workers in Southern Illinois

Matt DiLalla

Unity Point School, Carbondale

Teacher: Jim Berezow

Have you ever walked into a grocery store in the fall and picked out a crisp newly picked apple? You may not think that even if the apple was picked in Illinois the hands that picked it might not have come from this country. In southern Illinois Mexican immigrants pick much of the fruit.

Mexican immigrants started arriving there in the early 1940s. Most of them settled in Cobden or Anna. Immigrant workers were needed because most of the men that had been doing the work went to fight in World War II. The government had called for workers and the Mexican immigrants answered the call and came to fill in the positions. During January 1944, more than a thousand workers came to southern Illinois. By 1970 there were 117,268 Mexicans in Illinois. This was the largest number of Mexicans in the Midwest.

The main job that these immigrants were able to get was picking fruit. Most of the food that the migrants picked was apples, peaches, vegetables, and strawberries. The work day started at 6:00 A.M. and continued throughout the entire day. The income for a family was only about $1,100 a year. The children also worked in the strawberry fields picking strawberries. On the average every child age eight or over picked about 12,349 quarts of strawberries per season.

The migrant workers did not have very good living conditions. There were four main reasons for this. Most jobs only lasted for one or two weeks. The employers did not spend very much on housing their workers because of the short time that they worked at that place. Also, if the farmers had spent lots of money on housing, the cost per day would have been much higher. Thus, the workers would have earned a lot less money. As a result, they would not have had

enough money for other things that they needed such as food, health care, clothing, and education for their children that were younger than eight years old and not yet working. Fruit growing is also a highly competitive type of agriculture. This may have made the farmers spend less on housing and more on crops.

A third possible reason is that the migrant laborers did not demand good housing. They also did not complain about it to their employers. This suggests that they did not have good housing in their home communities, or that they were afraid that if they complained that they would lose their jobs. Lastly, migrant workers did not take very good care of their accommodations if the farmers provided it, suggesting that they did not really care. They might have not cared about the property because they were only living on it for a short time and they might not have considered it theirs to take care of. It might also have meant that they took what they got and did not want to waste time fixing it up if they were going to leave it and go somewhere else. They also might not have wanted to waste time on their housing so that they could go to work and earn money instead. It was also possible that the migrants were too tired from working dawn to dusk every day to even think about their housing.

Most of the migrant laborers did not get a very good education. Most children only completed the sixth grade before beginning to work on the farms. Many of the children did not attend school at all. This means that none of the migrants had a chance to better themselves or possibly go into a better paying occupation. It is possible that, because of having a bad education, the adults did not think that their children needed to get much of an education or any education at all. This is probably why few of the children thought of going into careers other than picking fruit.

[From Jane H. Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Social Life in Union County, Illinois in the Twentieth Century*; Melvin S. Brooks, *The Social Problems of Migrant Farm Laborers*; *The Daily Egyptian*, Aug. 27, 2001; Alison Guernsey, "Migrant Labor in Southern Illinois," *Illinois History*, Dec. 1997.]

Puerto Rican Immigrants to the Chicagoland Area After World War II

Rikki Edwards

Brookwood Junior High School, Glenwood

Teacher: Harry Daley

Puerto Ricans have immigrated to the United States of America and the Chicago land area since the early 1940s. Many have succeeded to high political, sports, and social standards. Puerto Rico's history, people, and heritage are as important as many other cultures in Chicagoland for many different reasons. Their culture has been discriminated against despite their contributions to our country's economic and war efforts. Puerto Ricans found Chicago along with many other cities as a place to plant their roots.

Puerto Ricans left their country in search of economic conditions and opportunities that our country offered for immigrants to satisfy wartime production. Many also immigrated because of poverty on their island. When they first arrived many worked in factories, mostly manufacturing companies. Most of the Puerto Rican immigrants settled in northeastern states. The biggest concentration was in New York which was home to 1.1 million Puerto Ricans. In 1917, the Jones Act granted American citizenship to Puerto Ricans. Within the last thirty years vast numbers of Puerto Ricans made home in New Jersey, Florida, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Illinois, California, Ohio, and Texas. In 1910 there were 1,500 Puerto Ricans in the United States; by 1930 there were 53,000 Puerto Ricans. Immigration to the Chicagoland area was primarily based on the steel industry, where many Puerto Ricans found work.

Most of the Puerto Rican immigrants came to Chicago during World War II. By 1980 112,000 Puerto Ricans lived in Chicagoland. The Northwest Side of Chicago received a greater

number of Puerto Ricans than any other part of Illinois. Chicago is the home to the second largest population of Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States behind New York, which is home to fifty percent of the Puerto Rican population in the United States. Many Puerto Ricans in Chicago were part of an organization called Caballeros de San Juan, Knights of St. John. The group's aim was to promote more Puerto Rican leadership in Chicago. In the late 1950s, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico established a second mainland office in Chicago. This office helped protect the rights of contract farm laborers in the midwestern states. West Town and Humboldt Park was the home of 42 percent of the Puerto Rican immigrants by the end of the 1970s.

Employment in Chicago was not hard to find. Many Puerto Ricans in Chicagoland found work in factories, since Chicago is one of the biggest manufacturing cities in the United States. Jobs were relatively unskilled; no education or ability to speak and understand English was necessary. The only thing a worker had to possess was the urge to work. Many of the workers in these factories lived in the suburbs of Chicago. Eight percent of the Puerto Ricans in the Chicagoland area lived in the suburbs.

A famous Puerto Rican group called Menudo brought its musical traditions to Chicagoland. Menudo's audience included twenty million Hispanics. "The sultry Latin dances in *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and *Salsa* (1988) made these films bog box-office hits," according to one historian. Menudo was the first Latin group to make a mark in Rock 'n' Roll. Menudo made over fifty million dollars annually.

The Puerto Ricans in Chicagoland have been a very influential race not just in the Chicagoland area but the whole United States of America. Puerto Ricans found work in a close-minded society. They provided for their families just like all other immigrants before and after their time. Some Puerto Ricans have been more successful than others. Puerto Ricans have been

able to adjust and survive economic struggles in the course of their life in Puerto Rico and in Chicagoland. Puerto Ricans are one of the many great races in Chicagoland.

[From J. Jerome Aliotta, *The Puerto Ricans*; James Davidson, *The American Nation*; G. Edward Hartmann, *American Immigration*; Joan Moore, *In the Barrios*; W. Martin Sandler, *Immigrants*.]

Zambian A Cappella

Maisie Graser

Civic Memorial High School, Bethalto

Teacher: Carol Phillips

America is arguably the most diverse country on the planet. In fact, the initial premise for America's establishment as a nation was based upon the concept of immigration. For centuries immigrants flocked to our borders searching for a haven that would provide relief from oppression and poverty. To this day, we are still considered to be a beacon of hope to others that lack it. It is this diversity that makes America the beautiful country that it has become. One group of immigrants that I truly believe has contributed to the cultural diversity in my area is a small group of boys from Zambia.

The small group is actually a gospel choir made up of about twelve young men. In Zambia, they all belonged to different tribes with different languages. All of them, however, sang for the choirs of their local churches. An American choir agency went to Zambia to recruit members for an African gospel choir that would tour the United States. In return for touring with the agency, the boys were to receive educations and the agency was to support their families. At the time when the agency was in Zambia, parts of the country had received little rain. It is also very common in Zambia for families to be very large. The agency's financial aid would be a tremendous blessing for each family. In May 1998, a dozen young Zambian men, none having the ability to speak English, left their families and came to America to sing African folk songs.

The Zambian A Cappella Boys toured constantly for one year with the agency, visiting forty-four states. Unfortunately, during this period of time, none of the boys received the education promised. Nor did the families receive any assistance. The agency had simply been

using the naïve boys. At the end of the year, the agency went out of business, landing the group in a prison in Dallas, Texas, that the Immigration and Naturalization Service rented. The boys were unpaid, uneducated, and alone in America. The little English that they knew was acquired simply from speaking to people. The group claims it was simply the work of God that led them to Illinois.

After living with foster families for a while, most of them now live together. Monday through Friday, they work as construction workers. However, on Sundays, they sing. Traveling to churches in the area, they sing their gospel songs. Now amazingly fluent, they tell their stories and collect donations to send back to Zambia, where over half the population is below the poverty level. Although the type of visas they were given does not allow them to visit Zambia, they spread their culture throughout this area, making it feel like home. The holidays of both countries have invoked a mutual enlightenment. For instance, when they celebrated the Zambian Independence Day, local elementary schools added African cultures to their curriculums. In addition, our custom of wearing costumes for Halloween absolutely shocked the young men. In Zambia, voodoo is taken seriously and the customes are frightening. The sight of young children wearing diabolical costumes left them confused and frightened until it was explained.

Many immigrants come to America after leaving poverty stricken homelands and attempt to forget their previous lives and move on. However, by forgetting the past they are merely depriving the future. This wonderful group of boys has graced this area with a new knowledge and understanding of the outside world. They have embraced two cultures, still clinging to the old while adopting the new. It was immigration groups like the Zambian boys that the Statue of Liberty's inscription was calling as it reads, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

[From student historian's interview with Judi Bertels, Sept. 14, 2002; "Green Card Services," http://www.greencard.co.uk/ (Sept. 15, 2002); Barbara Rogers, *Zambia*; student historian's interview with Samson Siame, Sept. 14, 2002.]

Macedonian Immigrants in Illinois

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In 1972, Rushan and Razija Mehmedi immigrated to the United States from Macedonia. The conditions in their homeland were unsuitable for living, and when they came here they found jobs and security. Their family soon joined them in finding a new life full of opportunities. They also brought their native culture. Adapting was hard at first, but they grew to love the country that fulfilled their hopeful dreams. They decided to immigrate when some relatives informed them of the opportunities that awaited them in America.

Rushan and Razija came to America from Macedonia in 1972. Their original plan was to make five thousand dollars and then return to their homeland. They first lived in Chicago, and both found work shortly after their arrival. Rushan was a cook in a restaurant, while Razija worked in a hotel. After a year-and-a-half they had made enough money, but decided that they wanted to make the United States their permanent home. They bought a car and moved to Dixon, Illinois. Here they opened up a steak house, but then sold it to another Macedonian family. They then traveled to Oregon, Illinois, where they stayed. Rushan opened up a small restaurant, the "Sunrise Family Restaurant," in the nearby city of Byron. Although life in America was going well for the young couple, conditions in their homeland got worse.

Although the conditions were not life-threatening, unemployment was at an all-time high. The country was under communist rule. After hearing of the wonderful opportunities in America, Razija's brother, Kako, sister Chama, brother-in-law, Sevdo, and her mother decided to follow in their footsteps. In 1983 they landed in America. Kako became interested in the

restaurant business as well and opened up a “Sunrise Family Restaurant” in Oregon. Likewise, Sevdo opened one in Rochelle. In 1995 Razija's nephew, Elvis, came to America because the Macedonian medical system was poor and he had a heart problem. His mother, although still living in Macedonia, decided that Elvis would live a better life if he stayed with his aunt in America, and he started working for his uncle right away. They all had jobs, security, and most importantly, they were happy. As the years passed, their businesses prospered, and the quality of their lives continued to improve.

The group, with the exception of Rushan, now lives in Silver Ridge Subdivision just outside of Oregon. Rushan has moved to Clinton, Iowa, and owns the Clinton Family Restaurant. Razija recently bought her own restaurant, Scoops, in Oregon. The restaurants owned by the immigrant group have good business. When Razija was asked if there were any negatives to moving to America she said, "All of it was positive, there were no real negatives."

The group brought their culture with them. They celebrate the Islamic holidays, such as Ramadan, Eid El Fitr, and the Islamic New Year. Ramadan begins on November 6. During this time they are not to eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. December 5 is the Eid El Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting. During this time they visit the mosque in Rockford, Illinois, and then return home to have a great feast. On March 4, they celebrate their Islamic New Year. Because of their ability to bring their native culture with them, they can have the best of both worlds.

However, while America did have the great opportunity of good education, school in the new world was not so easy for Elvis. He knew little English, and he said, "Teachers would assign me homework, but I would have no idea what they were saying. So, I didn't do it." Making friends was also difficult for him. Elvis took the course English as a Second Language and he caught on quickly. Soon, he adapted and made friends, along with the rest of his family.

The Macedonian group is now an important part of the community of Oregon. Its members are all very brave people for taking a chance and coming to a world they knew little about. The conditions in Macedonia were rough, and they knew something had to be done. They all agree now that it was the right decision. Although they will always miss their homeland, they have their culture, family, and most importantly, they have their freedom to cherish.

[From student historian's interview with Elvis Beneski, Sept. 16, 2002; student historian's interview with Razija Mehmedi, Sept. 19, 2002; New Jersey Department of Education, "List of Religious Holidays Calendar for 2002-03," <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/genfo/holidays.htm>. (Sept. 22, 2002; Oct. 11, 2002).

An Immigrant Family Full of Hope

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Coming to America from China—or moving to any country, for that matter—means taking a risk. Most immigrants will tell you that the real risk does not begin until the journey from their homeland to their new country is complete. Risking the familiar for the unfamiliar, a degree of comfort for success or failure, can sometimes be traumatic. Whatever the immigrant's goal—be it education, freedom, wealth, or all three—the immigrant learns that any dream worth pursuing does not come easy, and language and loneliness are just two of the barriers they must face along the way.

From half way around the world and over the course of eleven years, a Chinese family decided to cross the Pacific Ocean and eventually come to Illinois. The father, Jian Dong, immigrated to the United States in 1985, temporarily settling in New York City where he worked in a restaurant, with the hope of making enough money to manage his own restaurant some day.

Within two years, the first half of Jian's dream came true when in 1987, he moved from Manhattan, New York to Mattoon, Illinois, establishing himself in the restaurant business. He opened his own restaurant and called it "Happy China." Jian toiled nine years at "Happy China" before he saw his wife and three children again. In 1996, the remainder of Jian's family immigrated to the United States after his wife, Bi Dong, and children, Sherry, Tao, and Li were able to meet both the Chinese and United States immigration requirements. Although it took eleven years, the Dong family was finally reunited, and Jian had achieved the second half of his American dream.

After five years of adjusting to the strange surroundings of the United States and Mattoon in particular, Jian's eldest child and daughter, Sherry, left the family business in 2001 and moved south from Mattoon to Breese. Sherry loved the fact that she was free to move any where in the United States, but she chose to settle in southern Illinois. Sherry explained that she "wanted to pursue her own American dream." Since Breese is a small, German community, one may wonder why a Chinese immigrant would choose this town to start a business. But that is exactly what Sherry Dong did; she followed in her father's footsteps when she opened her own restaurant, "China City." When I asked why she wanted to move to Breese, Sherry told me, "I chose Breese to open 'China City' because Breese is a small, friendly town which had no Chinese restaurant, and I thought it would be good for business. I also wanted to share my customs with others." She described the Chinese as intelligent and caring people, however, "China is an oppressive country where human rights violations are common," Sherry stated. In China, women are paid significantly less than men for the same jobs. She also told me that the current law in China allows parents to have only one child per family unless the family farms, in which case families may have two children but only if the first child is a daughter. However, Sherry was quick to tell me that the family must wait a minimum of four years to have the second child.

In the past fifty years, many Asian immigrants, including the Chinese, have immigrated to the United States and have often formed what we might call "immigrant chains." Upon arriving in the United States, the Chinese, like many other immigrant groups, face discrimination. Yet, the desire to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave overpowers the fear of the unknown in a foreign land. The Chinese have proven to be outstanding citizens, and they need to be treated as such. No matter what their race, age, or heritage, each and every immigrant comes to American in pursuit of a dream as the Dong family did.

[From student historian's interview with Sherry Dong, Sept. 1, 21, and 22, 2002; Dorothy Dowdell and Joseph Dowdell, *The Chinese Helped Build America*; Patricia Lacey, *Our Illinois Heritage*, *Illinois Reading Council Journal* (Spring, 1998).]

A Vietnamese Interview

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Vietnam is a country that the United States knows all too well. Barbi Vu and her family are Vietnamese people who have experienced life in both countries. She has been through a lot of events in her life, and I was lucky enough to interview such an interesting woman. You would never believe the differences there are between the Philippines and Vietnam on the one hand and the United States on the other.

Barbi Vu, her six brothers and sisters, two aunts, and her mother and father all immigrated to the United States from the Philippines on April 4, 1975. "We traveled on a boat until we reached the refugee camp which was the INS (Immigrant National Security) on the Guam Islands." Barbi and her family waited for about two months at the refugee camp. "We slept in a small tent placed in the camp waiting to be brought into America." Finally, Barbi's dream came true when the St. Andrews church located in Rock Falls, Illinois, said it would be delighted to sponsor such a wonderful family. Although it was rough on the town, they all supported the family's move to Rock Falls. The church did not have a lot of money, but they saw to it that the family would have a house to turn to and that Barbi's father would have a job to rely on. The church also gave essential needs to the whole family, such as money, food, and clothing. They were placed in a low-income government apartment building, and the family did not have a problem with that because they were happy to be in America after waiting so long.

The main reason for the Vu family moving to America was to get away from the communists trying to take over their country. They knew that the United States was a good place

to move to because of all the freedoms it has. Vietnamese people had their freedom taken away from them because of the North overthrowing the South. That is when a big war started and the guards had to evacuate the South. Barbi said, "I remember when I was seven years old and I was sitting in class at the St. Daminakin sisters schooling and all of a sudden I heard a big boom. Then I looked out the window and the American Embassy was getting bombed by the communists. I was so scared and all I thought about was getting my butt into that bombshell before the guards shoot at me too."

There were differences between the two countries. For example, in the Philippines they start their schooling at the age of three. "The United States of America was beautiful compared to Vietnam." Her country was poor, war-torn, and more middle-class people living in it rather than rich people. The rich people in Vietnam are very similar to the middle-class people living in America. For example, the rich Vietnamese people had electricity and plumbing. Barbi was puzzled when she heard of the kind of schooling in America. There was a vast difference in the grading levels. In Vietnam there is no middle school, only two separate buildings for grade school and a high school building.

A Vietnamese tradition is that on New Year's Day families celebrate all birthdays. Money is usually the present received.

Barbi Vu and her family became citizens of America after living here for about a year. They had to take a test and be sworn in. Her parents had to speak in front of the judge in a Supreme Court. Barbi told me, "I became a citizen of the United States automatically because I was only the age of seven at that time."

As you can see Vietnam is an interesting country. I have learned many remarkable facts about their traditions and culture. Now Barbi Vu and her family have experienced several sides

of the world even though all experiences were not good. That is one reason why America is such an amazing place filled with freedom and opportunity.

[From student historian's interview with Barbi Vu, Sept. 22, Sept. 23, and Sept. 24, 2002.]